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SIPDIS

NEA/ARP JHARRIS AND JBERNDT

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SUBJECT: UNHRC GOLDSTONE ENDORSEMENT WELCOMED IN SAUDI
ARABIA

REF: JEDDAH 215

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Classified By: Ambassador James B. Smith for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) The U.N. Human Rights Council's endorsement of the Goldstone Report was hailed as a major victory in Saudi Arabia while the USG's decision to vote against the resolution has left many Saudis questioning the USG's commitment to the Middle East peace process and ability to remain unbiased. Widespread media coverage and discussions with SAG officials indicate that the SAG as well as the Saudi public are discouraged and disappointed by the USG's vote. However, key Saudi interlocutors have demonstrated a more balanced approach to the Goldstone Report, believing that the media frenzy surrounding the Report is likely doing more harm than good.

SAG'S OFFICIAL RESPONSE

2. (C) In an October 19 Cabinet meeting chaired by King Abdullah, the Cabinet welcomed the adoption of the Goldstone Report by the U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC) stating that the adoption reflects the lack of legitimacy of Israeli actions in the Palestinian territories. However, more than one SAG official, including Saudi Permanent Representative to the U.N., Ambassador Khalid al-Nafisee, asserted in an October 16 meeting with former U.S. Charge d'Affaires Erdman in New York that the SAG supported the Goldstone resolution in deference to Arab League views. Talal al-Maleki, Director of the Arab League Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), expressed a similar view in a recent meeting with Poloff although prior to the UNHRC endorsement, he articulated a desire for the report to be considered by the U.N. Security Council. Al-Nafisee, on the other hand, claimed that if it had been up to him, he would have recommended consideration of the report be confined to Geneva and that periodically revisiting the issue and aggravating Israel with it served no useful purpose.

UNBIASED DECISION?

3. (C) Although the SAG views the passing of the resolution by a strong majority in the UNHRC as a major victory for a unified Arab League organization, other Saudis' feelings of disappointment and disillusionment with the USG's vote are readily visible. In an October 20 meeting with Poloffs,

National Society for Human Rights (NSHR) President, Dr. Mufleh al-Kahtani, questioned the motives of the USG in opposing the resolution, indicating that he was not only very disappointed but annoyed as well. He continued that the USG's opposition to the resolution equates to direct support for Israel and that enemies of the USG will gain support from the USG's "pro-Israel" Goldstone vote. Echoing the feelings of many Arabs who have "great expectations" of the Obama administration since the Cairo speech (Reftel), al-Kahtani believes that the "best chance for peace in the Middle East is under this administration." He emphatically added that the USG "must be stronger with the Israelis" if there is to be peace in the Middle East. (Note: NSHR is a quasi-governmental organization. There are no other officially recognized human rights organizations in Saudi Arabia. End Note).

¶4. (C) In an October 22 letter to the Ambassador published in Al-Watan newspaper, an unidentified person described his "extreme sadness and frustration," questioning how the USG can promote human rights and then vote against the Goldstone resolution. He continued by pointing out the hypocrisy he sees in the USG's actions and asks, "How can you convince me today to stand on the neutral side?" Articles and editorials published in numerous newspapers, including the influential Al-Riyadh and the conservative Al-Madina, echoed the same sentiments as the Al-Watan letter - the vast majority arguing that Israel should be held accountable for its actions, the Palestinians need to unify their leadership, and that there is widespread disappointment over the USG's vote.

¶5. (C) Al-Maleki also criticized Mahmoud Abbas for agreeing to withdraw the UNHRC motion to review the commission's findings, stating that Abbas made a tactical error, most likely as the result of USG pressure on Abbas to withdraw the

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motion.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) The SAG's reaction to the Goldstone Report and USG resolution vote were both predictable and expected. The USG's opposition to the Goldstone resolution has put a damper on the high expectations held by many Saudis since the President's Cairo speech. Although it appears that many Saudis still view the USG's participation in the Middle East peace process as essential to negotiating a two-state solution, the post-Cairo speech honeymoon phase seems to be coming to an end. It is interesting to note, however, that although the issue of the Goldstone report came up in several different meetings with Poloffs and was heavily covered by the media, the issue was never raised by Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal in an October 17 meeting with the Ambassador. Most likely, senior Saudi officials seemingly realize that the best course of action is to move beyond the resolution as quietly and quickly as possible.

SMITH